

FILM ARCHIVES OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ZIMBABWE

MC Mukotekwa

National Archives of Zimbabwe

Introduction

The National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) houses the film archives of the institution as well as other audiovisual material. This includes sound archives, slides and literature. The Unit used to be part of our Library until 1988, when it became separate. Assistance in setting up the Unit was obtained from the Beit Trust and Japan. The Beit Trust helped us secure a Steenbeck editing table and the Japanese donated the ultrasonic film cleaning machine and telecine equipment under the Japanese Cultural Grant Aid. The Japanese also donated a theatre projector which we have not been able to utilise since 1991 because there was no auditorium. However, the government has now provided the funds for the construction of an auditorium.

Nature of holdings

The NAZ is a state archives and hence caters mainly for government departments. As a result most of our films were deposited by the Ministry of Information. There are very few films made by independent film producers because there is no law binding these producers to deposit their productions. It is very expensive for us to purchase these films in reel form as we have a limited budget. All our funding comes from government.

The bulk of the films in our holdings were produced by the Central African Film Unit (CAFU). This was government sponsored and operated in the period 1948-1963. CAFU was a regional film unit serving Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. Apart from CAFU, films were produced by British Gaumont, Pathe, International Television News, British Broadcasting Corporation Television, Rhodesia Information Service, Rank, and the Zimbabwe Information Service. The films consist mainly of newsreels, instructional films, travel films, propaganda films, interviews, political broadcasts and documentaries.

CAFU's main concern from 1953 to 1963 was publicity and propaganda films to popularise the federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland at home and abroad. They also made instructional films for Africans designed to get basic concepts about better living conditions to the largely illiterate Africans. Most of these films are silent because they catered for a diverse audience speaking different languages. A narrator was usually provided to interpret the films in the language of the audience.

CAFU also made newsreels. There were separate newsreels for blacks and whites. Rhodesian Spotlight (1953-1963) catered for the whites, and Rhodesia and Nyasaland News (1957-1963) catered for blacks. The former was produced twice a month, whilst the latter was produced once a month. These newsreels covered

events within the three territories.

As a former British colony, we also have films on Britain and the Empire. Most of these are in the form of newsreels and were produced by the British Information Service. These are films promoting Britain and major British events like the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

There is a small but growing collection of films on video. Most of the films are purchased and they have to be about Zimbabwe. The few feature films we have are on video. Films that are in great demand are put on video for easier access and to preserve the original. Some videos are deposited by producers/researchers in return for use of our footage. The videos are recorded on Umatic and VHS.

Database management

The Audiovisual Unit has compiled a computerised catalogue of films using a UNESCO software package called CDS/ISIS. We have created four databases for film, namely Rhodesia Spotlight, Rhodesia and Nyasaland News, General Film, and Video. At present the databases have the following entries:

General films	1828
Rhodesia Spotlight	196
Rhodesia and Nyasaland News	82
Video	141

The sections on video and general film are still growing as more films are added to the collections. All films in the other two sections have been captured. It is hoped to add a database for negatives as soon as we have the expertise to do so. Presently negatives are recorded in a register.

Current activities

The NAZ and the Netherlands Film Museum (NFM) are currently involved in a project called " **To Preserve the Cinematographic Heritage of Zimbabwe** ". The government of the Netherlands is sponsoring the project. As part of the project the two audiovisual archivists underwent a three-week training programme at NFM in June 1999. They were taught about film handling and preservation. For a long time the archivists were neither trained nor had any exposure in the preservation of film until the NFM came to our aid. Presently the two archivists are trying to put into practice what they learnt and this to a certain extent means reorganising the film archives. For instance, all negatives now have to be stored in a climate controlled environment, something we did not do. The training will also improve the quality of descriptions which entails modifying the databases in order to capture some technical aspects which we used to overlook.

The NAZ embarked on production of a **Guide to Audiovisual Materials** some time ago. This is still ongoing and it is being modified in accordance with new knowledge acquired at NFM as regards presentation and layout. As part of the project we are working on a comprehensive film policy for the Unit to address the problems of conservation and disclosure.